



The Weekly Wrap Up

February 3, 2006

From Viola Miller, Tennessee's Commissioner for
The Department of Children's Services

Don't Be Bashful

Many of you are working hard to develop community partnerships. We are reaching out to the faith community, local governments, organizations and individuals who care about the well being of families and children. We all know that we cannot do this very important work of ours alone. We must engage caring communities to support our vulnerable families. There are groups in every community willing and even eager to provide assistance.

Many of our families and children have very basic needs that must be met before they can heal as a family and keep their children safe and nurtured. A family lacking food, clothing or shelter cannot benefit much from family therapy until those basic needs are met.

We can only get the help we need when we know what we need and **ask specifically** for that need to be met. For instance, if your community doesn't have a food bank or clothing bank, find a faith based group and ASK if they would start one. My Murray church started a thrift shop several years ago. It is now a very large operation and managed by a board with paid employees. Angel's Attic sells all children's clothing for \$.25 and the items fly off the shelves.

Many communities have summer youth programs that offer programs free to the community. My Nashville church sponsors "East Nashville Hope Exchange." Educational and recreational programs are offered during the summer months for children who may have nowhere else safe to be.

If we need four foster homes for teens in a particular area, go to four churches or organizations and ask each to try to find one family. Also ask the group to agree to be a support network for that resource family.

If we need mentors, ask specifically for what you need . . . "We need five men willing to give one hour each week for the next six months mentoring one of our young people. Can you help?"

A huge area of need is safe, adequate housing. Develop a relationship with the housing folks in your community and see if they will place priority on families at risk of having their children removed. A local faith organization may be willing to start a home repair ministry.

Another group may be willing to start a transportation or car repair ministry. We'll never know until we ASK.

Once we get the ASK then we must follow up to use the resource provided. Nothing turns groups off more than agreeing to help, finding the resource and then we don't use it.

Families must have their basic needs met before they can move forward. Communities are willing to help.

Go ASK.

-- VIOLA P. MILLER

Recommended Reading From The Commissioner

Newsweek: The Trouble With Boys

They're kinetic, maddening and failing at school. Now educators are trying new ways to help them succeed.

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/10965522/site/newsweek/>

Youth Villages Sends Its Regards

E-Mailed Letter Praises the Help They Received in Sumner County

Hello! I wasn't sure who to send this to, so please forward this to whoever oversees the **Sumner County** office. I wanted to make sure that two of your employees were recognized for their professionalism and assistance during a crisis assessment for a DCS child that I was called out to make early Monday morning at Northcrest Medical Center. The on-call caseworker, **Kathleen Sander**, was very helpful, informative, and supportive during the actual crisis assessment. I followed up with the client's caseworker, **Kelly Rocko**, later that day, to check on how client was doing. She promptly called me back and let me know that client was doing better and was on her way to her regularly scheduled counseling appointment. She also told me that she had made a medication evaluation for client this coming Friday. She had already followed through on my recommendations before I even told her! Needless to say, I was VERY impressed by both caseworkers and look forward to working again with them in the future. They obviously work very hard and I applaud them for being able to maintain such positive and professional attitudes!

Ashley Johnston, M.S.

Senior Crisis Counselor

Youth Villages

Nashville, TN

'I Want So Badly To Tell Other Kids It's O.K.'

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To whom it may concern;

My name is Natasha Walker. My friends call me Mandy. I grew up in a half way decent, but very loving home. I was born, and raised, right here in Tennessee, which I am convinced has been painted orange over the last few weeks.

But that's not the point.

I was a troubled kid. I was molested when I was little by a man I thought I could trust. I lashed out at the whole world and blamed everyone for what he did. I couldn't forgive him or me, and I couldn't get on with my life. Before I woke up I was diagnosed with every disease they could diagnose a child with, ADD, ADHD, bi-polar, manic depressive- but the medicine didn't help because that wasn't the problem.

I was arrested so many times for unruly I knew everyone at the Blount County Courthouse by name, I knew most of their lives stories, I was close with several of them, and it got to the point where I felt better when I was in juvi then I did when I was at home. My mother was worn out. She had me- an unruly kid who once was her rock, Erscon- a shy sweet little boy who missed his big sister, and Jed- a little boy trapped inside his own body with Mosaic Monosomy 21, a rare form of autism.

She worked three jobs, including owning her own business, and couldn't take me any more. My real dad wasn't there, the boys dad was struggling with alcohol problems and couldn't hold a job, and my daddy, Steve was dying on the inside watching me destroy my life.

An officer in the Juvenile Court - Officer Holly Cantrell, made me wake up and realize that although I had been abused, and felt alone, my brothers needed me and my parents really did care about me. I saw my daddy three weeks after I had been in lock down at the Blount County Juvenile.

He begged me to change, to grow up, to take charge of my life and do something with it.

I saw how desperate he was to see me succeed and I decided it was time to change. From that date on, I was a new person. I was enrolled in Heritage High School, and I began to use my resources at the school.

My teachers inspired me, encouraged me, and stood by me, and went to bat for me when no one else would. My mother stood back, and let me do my own thing.

The one thing about my story that people don't see is that I was only arrested for my attitude. Never drugs, not to say I wasn't using.

I was in pain. I felt alone. I know what that feeling is. I had people there for me and I've succeeded so far. I graduated in May 2005, with really good grades. Although I didn't get my 3.0 I was aiming for, I did get pretty close.

I won the Turn Around Award from the state for Heritage High School. If I can do it with all the hate I had inside I know other kids can too, and I want them to. I want so badly to tell other kids that it's O.K.

We hear adults, and most of the time we don't believe them because we feel like they don't know, most adults grew up in an entirely different world than what we've been growing in. Not to say it was easier, but it was very different. I know how these kids feel, I want to help them. I want them to find courage in themselves to become whatever they want to be.

Even if it's just volunteering with a few kids a week, I want to be there. I want to be their bit of hope. I want to show them that life isn't your past, it's your future. You can't change yesterday, all you can do is live today so that tomorrow you don't have any regrets. If these kids follow the same destructive past that they've been following, if they follow their parents past, they will be putting their kids in your system again as soon as they get out.

Please, take me serious, I want to help these kids. I want to open their eyes to a new world. The same way mine were opened. I want to show these kids that they can be loved, and they can love.

I want them to succeed. I want so badly to see the test scores in Tennessee raise, and the teen pregnancy rate to decline. Most girls my age only have sex in the first place to hear someone, anyone, say that they love them.

If we say it first, someone else can't say it and ruin both of their lives.

I hope that you receive this letter, and it's untampered, and you see how badly I want to help.

Thank you so much for your time. I hope together, we can work with kids who have a dark past and make their future brighter.

Sincerely,
Mandy Walker
Age 18
Maryville